

Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

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Pruning Prompt, Resilient Gardens

HERE IS THE BIG NEWS!

Resilient Gardens 2016: Climate Change, Stress Disorders, Pest Update is off the press and for sale through my web site, a few local bookstores, and at all of my talks and workshops this year. Read all about it! <http://lindagilkeson.ca/books.html>

Now that's out of my system, here are some tips on what to do right now:

First, stop worrying about the garlic: I know it is really shooting up, but the young leaves are very hardy. If there is more cold coming they should be fine (and you can't stop them). If you want, pull away the mulch just enough to let the shoots grow straight. If you don't do this, they will poke through eventually anyway.

Pruning: With buds swelling and the snowdrops blooming, it looks like the warm conditions will bring out fruit blossoms early again this year. Usually we can count on having all of February to finish dormant pruning of fruit trees, grapes and berry bushes, but it is a good idea to finish up your dormant pruning sooner, if you can. Several fruit tree diseases are readily spread while conditions are wet, so it is best to prune on a dry day to avoid spreading diseases, including European canker on apples, black knot on plum and cherry, bacterial canker on cherries and peaches. Photos of all of these are on my web site. If you see hard, shrivelled up, mummified fruit still attached to branches, knock them out of the tree with a stick and dispose of them (in garbage, by burning or burying, but not composting). Those mummies are where the brown rot fungus overwinters on peaches, plums and cherries.

When pruning, do sanitize your pruning shears between trees, or even between branches if the trees have cankers, by dipping them in disinfectant: 1 part bleach (hydrogen peroxide 'eco-bleach' or chlorine) to 4 parts water.

Spraying: If your trees had pest or disease problems for which dormant oil or lime sulphur sprays will work, then that needs to be done now too. But don't spray either pesticide unless you know it is necessary. Otherwise it just causes needless harm to beneficial mites and fungi (there are lots of those on the surfaces of plants!). Although both pesticides can be mixed together and sprayed, the best timing for dormant oil differs from the best time to use lime sulphur for common problems. (Photos of most of the problem listed below are on my web site).

Mid-winter dormant oil sprays help control various species of scales and aphids, eggs of winter moth and eggs of leafrollers (those little green caterpillars that infest fruit and rose buds in the spring) and red mites. Dormant oil is not effective on tent caterpillar eggs.

Dormant lime sulphur sprays are most effective for the following problems if applied twice: once in the fall, just as the leaves are falling off the trees, and again in the spring, just as buds are swelling. Even if you didn't do the fall spray, it is well worth doing the spring spray if these were a problem:

-Pear leaf blister mites: timing is important to catch the mites while they are on the bud scales.

-Pear scab: it overwinters on the tree as well as on fallen leaves. Note that lime sulphur won't help with apple scab, because this fungus does not overwinter on branches. For both kinds of scab it is also

important to destroy the fallen leaves, where fungi overwinter. Rake up and compost the leaves or go over them a few times with a mower so they disintegrated quickly under the trees.

-Peach leaf curl: Sprays help, but won't eliminate this disease. The spring spray for peaches should be early in February.

And, oh yes.... no January note would be complete without the usual warning to pull those pesky Hairy Bittercress (AKA 'snapweed', 'smartweed', 'jumpin' Jesus', etc.). You all know this small rosette of cress-like leaves with tiny white flowers and seeds that pop everywhere. It is a small winter annual that grows quickly at this time of year and will soon be shooting off seeds--long before most of us give a thought to weeding. Tweak up the small plants right now and drop them in the compost or use the nicer leaves in salads.

And one more thing: If you are coming to the end of your harvest on Brussels sprout plants, keep the harvested stalks standing in the garden. They should produce very tasty, tender little shoots from around where each sprout was picked off the stem. This is such a delicacy that I now think of it as the second crop of Br. sprouts. If your plants haven't produced proper sprouts by now, they won't, but they will still grow quite a lot of these delightful shoots from where the sprouts should have been.

Seedy Saturdays coming up:

Feb. 6. Qualicum Beach. Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, 747 Jones St. See:

<http://www.qbseedysaturday.com/> My talk is at 10:30 am: 'Do You REALLY Know What the Problem Is?' and I will have a table with books for sale.

Feb. 12,13, 14. Salt Spring Seedy weekend at the Farmer's Institute. Movie on Friday night, Seedy Saturday events and workshops on Sunday. See: <http://saltspringmarket.com/salt-spring-island-event/seedy-saturday-sowing-the-seeds-of-love/>. I will be giving a workshop at 1:00 pm, Sunday, on 'Resilient Gardening'.

Feb. 20. Victoria Seedy Saturday, Victoria Conference Centre. See: <http://jamesbaymarket.com/seedy-saturday-speakers-2016/> My talk is at 11:30: 'Resilient Food Gardens for a Changing Climate'. I will be selling my books at the author table outside the Metchosin Room.

My speaking schedule for 2016 is fully booked. Check the calendar on my web site <http://lindagilkeson.ca/> for talks, workshops and gardening classes in your area, also for book sales and hundreds of colour photos of pests, diseases and disorders to help you identify problems. All of my previous gardening messages are archived on my Gardening Tips page: http://lindagilkeson.ca/gardening_tips.html